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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: CAMEL JOCKEY REPATRIATIONS CONTINUE -- RACING
BEGINS WITHOUT LIVE JOCKEYS

REF: A. 05 ABU DHABI 4737

[1](#)B. 05 ABU DHABI 4903

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The UAEG is close to concluding the repatriation of former camel jockeys to their countries of origin. Having already sent 1,038 jockeys home, only 27 children remain at the Bani Yas shelter outside Abu Dhabi. UNICEF,s representative in Abu Dhabi monitoring progress on the rescue and repatriation of the boys expressed satisfaction about the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Dubai Police, saying they have been very cooperative in the repatriation process, often seeming to compete with each other over who can do more, faster, and better. The UNICEF representative and PolOff attended separate camel races in Abu Dhabi where all the jockeys were robots. End summary.

Repatriations Continue

[1](#)2. (U) UAEG continues to be forthcoming in reporting trafficking issues. On January 23, an official at the Ministry of Interior contacted the Embassy to volunteer the following information: the repatriation of former camel jockeys continues while the number of children remaining in the shelter drops to only 27. From March 2005 when the UAEG announced its intention to pass a law banning persons under age 18 from taking part in camel races through January 14, the UAEG has repatriated 1,038 children and their resident family members, to their countries of origin, according to statistics provided by the UAEG.

[1](#)3. (U) Countries of origin for the children repatriated:
- Pakistan -- 552
- Bangladesh -- 311
- Sudan -- 151
- Mauritania -- 17
- Eritrea -- 7

[1](#)4. (U) Countries of origin for the children remaining in shelters:
- Pakistan)- 13
- Bangladesh -) 5
- Sudan)- 8
- Mauritania -- 1

[1](#)5. (SBU) Buthayna al-Khatib, UNICEF,s representative in Abu Dhabi, confirms that the MoI,s statistics agree with UNICEF data. She noted that MoI officials have been extremely cooperative through this process as have the Dubai Police. She proffered that there seems to be some competition between the two emirates, police authorities which has resulted in each trying to outperform the other in identifying jockeys and locating relatives to whom they can be sent. She noted that this "friendly" competition has been a "welcome surprise" that has been of great benefit to the program and the children involved.

Camel Racing without Children

[1](#)6. (SBU) Al-Khatib stated that she had been attending camel races in Abu Dhabi Emirate during the week of January 19-25, and had found no children working in or at the races in any manner. She reported that the races she attended appeared to be run by robot jockeys only. She further reported that she had been looking into the implementation of the new licensing and identification requirements for jockeys and noted that they seemed to be working well. Offering that perhaps because of the high profile of the jockey issue, she has found no evidence that anybody has even attempted to circumvent the new regulations.

[1](#)7. (SBU) On January 25, PolOff attended a camel race at the al-Wathba racetrack in Abu Dhabi. The race was the concluding competition of a week-long event at the track. The racetrack was open to the public, and although police were present they did not appear to monitor who attended the race. Spectators used binoculars and cameras without objection, and portions of the races were shown during the sporting news broadcasts of several local television stations. The race was run with

robot jockeys only, and PolOff did not see any children working at the racetrack in any capacity.

18. (U) PolOff noted that the race was not as well-attended as in the past, even though it was the concluding race at al-Wathba. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the race was run on a weekday, but it may indicate a waning interest in camel racing. Since the camel racing season began, neither the English nor Arabic language press has reported much on camel racing. When questioned, a reporter at "Gulf News" stated that he thinks this is due to lack of general interest in the sport, not editorial restrictions.

19. (U) On December 5, "Gulf News" reported on the switch to robot jockeys and the impacts that it has had on racing. The article reported that while camel farm owners were supportive of the government's decision to ban child jockeys, many were refusing to race camels without live jockeys. One prominent owner was quoted as saying that "the sport is in a coma right now." He explained that as it will take three to four years to prepare a stable of racing camels trained with the heavier jockeys, most of the owners he knows have chosen to eat their losses until the next generation of camels are ready rather to race with the "abomination" robots. Contrarily, a UK diplomat told us that camel farm owners who met the Duke of York during a recent visit to Abu Dhabi commented on how much easier it was to use robots because they did not require as much care as young boys.

110. (SBU) Comment: We continue to hear anecdotes about underage camel jockeys being used in races in more remote regions of the UAE, but we have not been able to substantiate any of these reports. Contacts at the Embassy of Pakistan state that they have been investigating these anecdotal reports as well, but that they have not been able to substantiate any of them either. We will report septel on our discussions with Dubai Police this week, including their efforts to rescue underage camel jockeys, and determine what measures they have taken to tackle the UAE's continuing problem of trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

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